

Tabernacle Renovation Finished; Historic Building Dates Back

By N. L. CHRISTENSEN

The historic Provo Tabernacle is resplendent and more useful than ever following virtual completion of a \$100,000 improvement and restoration project.

The tabernacle, both a church and community center through the years, was constructed in the 1880s and 1890s by members of Utah Stake, which at that time comprised all of Utah Valley.

Third Oldest Stake

The third oldest stake in the LDS Church today, Utah Stake has since been divided a number of times. The 2½-year renovation project now being completed has been carried out by four stakes of Provo — Utah, West Utah, Provo, and East Provo.

of Utah Stake and chairman of buildings for the four stakes, has been in charge of architectural work in connection with the improvement.

Work accomplished in the project has included:

Repair and cleaning of brick and masonry; painting of interior and exterior woodwork; new seating on main floor, balcony, and choir loft; structural revision of stand to facilitate access to choir loft; new exits at north-east and southeast corners on main floor which also provide accessibility to balcony; extensive landscaping and construction of 40-car parking lot.

Other Improvements

Repair of windows and exterior doorways and installation of new door fixtures; sound system and acoustical improvements still in progress.

of choir section floor; new carpeting for aisles, stairways and foyers; removal of old home at rear; construction of platform in front for convenience of entry and exit.

Lighting of tabernacle and grounds for night display; improved West entrance off parking lot with shelter constructed over doorway; new sidewalks; improvements in boiler house; extensive heating system changes.

Over the years the tabernacle has been the scene of many important community and cultural events. Among these have been a historic program Jan. 4, 1896 to celebrate statehood — Utah's admission into the Union as the 45th state; an address by William Howard Taft, 27th president of the United States, Sept. 24, 1897, and concerts by some

of the world's greatest artists — musicians, including pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff and violinist Fritz Kreisler, brought here through the BYU-Community Lyceum Series.

Need for the tabernacle was discussed by Utah Stake leaders in the late 1870s. Abraham O. Smoot, then stake president (he was also mayor and chairman of the board of trustees for Brigham Young Academy) pointed out that the Old Meeting House was too small now to accommodate stake audiences.

(The Old Meeting House, also known as the Old Tabernacle) was erected in the 1860s, dedicated in 1867, and torn down in 1919. It was located on the same block, just north of the present tabernacle, facing on Center Street.)

Building Committee

At stake conference Sept. 1-2, 1882, H. H. Cluff, J. P. R. Johnson, and J. C. Snyder were appointed as a building committee. Construction proceeded in 1883.

William H. Folsom, prominent early-day church architect, did the architectural work for the tabernacle. He is credited also as being architect for many other notable buildings, including the Manti Temple, Salt Lake Theater, and the old Provo Theater, later known as the opera house and finally as the armory (it was torn down about 15 years ago).

Early in December 1885 a 30 by 24 foot room in the west part of the tabernacle was finished and dedicated for use for quorum and other meetings. President Smoot offered the dedicatory prayer. (This was not the dedication of the building, as some have believed but simply on the one room.)

The tabernacle was complet-

being held in cities other than Salt Lake City.

Franklin D. Richards was the presiding officer at the conference here. It was a great occasion for Provo — and there was quite a traffic jam according to the Territorial Enquirer which reported in its Tuesday, April 6 edition: "Almost with the dawn of day wagons, buggies, and every description of conveyance loaded with conference visitors came streaming into Provo on Sunday, from every direction. For hours the roads were lined with vehicles and pedestrians. In and around the tabernacle block before the hour of commencement there were some thousands of persons congregated . . ."

Lack of Funds

After the general conference, construction was resumed — but slowed considerably for lack of funds as assessments made to the various wards lagged. President Smoot instituted a program under which each male member was urged to pay 50

cents per month and each woman 25 cents per month.

The first stake conference in the building was held Sept. 2, 1888, and President Smoot forecast that with full cooperation the building could be finished in six months.

But money matters continued to plague the project. Times were hard; the people were called on to donate in construction of the new B. Y. Academy building (on the present Lower Campus) after fire had destroyed the old Lewis Building Jan. 27, 1884; and the church called for donations to help finish the Salt Lake Temple which was finally dedicated April 6, 1893. (The Academy structure, was dedicated Jan. 4, 1892 but a heavy debt still remained.)

The tabernacle building committee was released with a vote of thanks March 5, 1892 and a new one — consisting of S. S. Jones, chairman, James E. Daniels, V. L. Halliday, Henry Gardner and W. D. Robinson — was appointed.

The boiler and heating system were installed in the winter of 1892-93.

Final Push

President Smoot died March 6, 1895. His successor, Edward Partridge, pressed on with the work of raising money for the tabernacle project. Reed Smoot (who later became an LDS apostle and U. S. Senator), then a counselor to President Partridge, was appointed chairman of a final push to complete the work at the dawn of 1898.

The building was dedicated April 17, 1898 at stake conference by George Q. Cannon, then first counselor to Church President Wilford Woodruff. News papers reported that "fully 400 persons were present." The tabernacle (with seating capacity of about 2300-2500) was filled to overflowing with many standing throughout. Others seated in the Old Meeting House, were addressed by apostles attending the rites.

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to 80's

The Austin Organ Company pipe organ was installed in 1907. It was rebuilt and expanded in 1927 and 1962.

The original huge center tower of the tabernacle was removed in 1917 when it proved too heavy for the building.

A four-stake missionary committee now keeps the newly-renovated tabernacle open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays and from 5 to 8 p.m. on week days, with organ recitals held as announced. Many tourists as well as townspeople are taking advantage of the opportunity to view the historic building, according to Frederick C. Foxon of the committee.

A thought for the day: Swiss poet Henri-Frederic Amiel once said: "Doing easily what others find difficult is talent; doing what is impossible for talent is genius."

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ed, by 1886, to a point that it could accommodate the 56th general conference of the LDS Church April 4, 5, 6 and 7 of that year. This was during the polygamy hunts of that period when general conferences were